



RESEARCH BRIEF

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE SHIFT TO HOME-BASED EDUCATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

September 5, 2020

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HIGHLIGHTS

- In the early days of the pandemic, the majority of parents (78%) were educating their child at home.
- Only about half (55%) of parents felt prepared to educate their child at home and 50% of parents felt overwhelmed by responsibilities to educate their child at home.
- Two out of every five parents met the criteria for major depression (40%) and criteria for moderate or severe anxiety (40%).
- Nearly 1 in 4 parents (24%) indicated that their child was fearful or anxious.
- Over half of parents (58%) who utilized free/reduced-cost breakfast or lunch programs reported that they were no longer able to receive them during the pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus pandemic presented American parents with new challenges on how best to prepare and support their children for a very different beginning to the academic year. With many schools across the country suspending in-person education, parents are providing more direct care for their children. Furthermore, many families were experiencing economic hardship resulting from the pandemic. This research brief examines parenting and factors related to the transition to online learning experienced early in the pandemic.

PARTICIPANTS

The survey was launched on April 14, 2020, about four weeks after the White House administered social distancing guidelines to slow the spread of the Coronavirus. This report examines survey data from 405 U.S. adults who were the parent of at least one child age 12 and under, 69% of whom were mothers. The average age of parents was 34 years, and the average number of children was 2. The majority of the participants had at least a bachelor's

degree (41%) and identified as White (White: 71%, Black: 11%, Hispanic: 10%, Other: 8%). Average household income was between \$40,000 and \$50,000. Half of the parents in this survey had at least one child between the ages of 2 and 5, while 25% had at least one child under the age of 1, 36% had at least one child between the ages of 6 and 8, and 40% had at least one child between the ages of 9 and 12. The majority of parents (84%) had another adult in the home who was spending time taking care of the children.

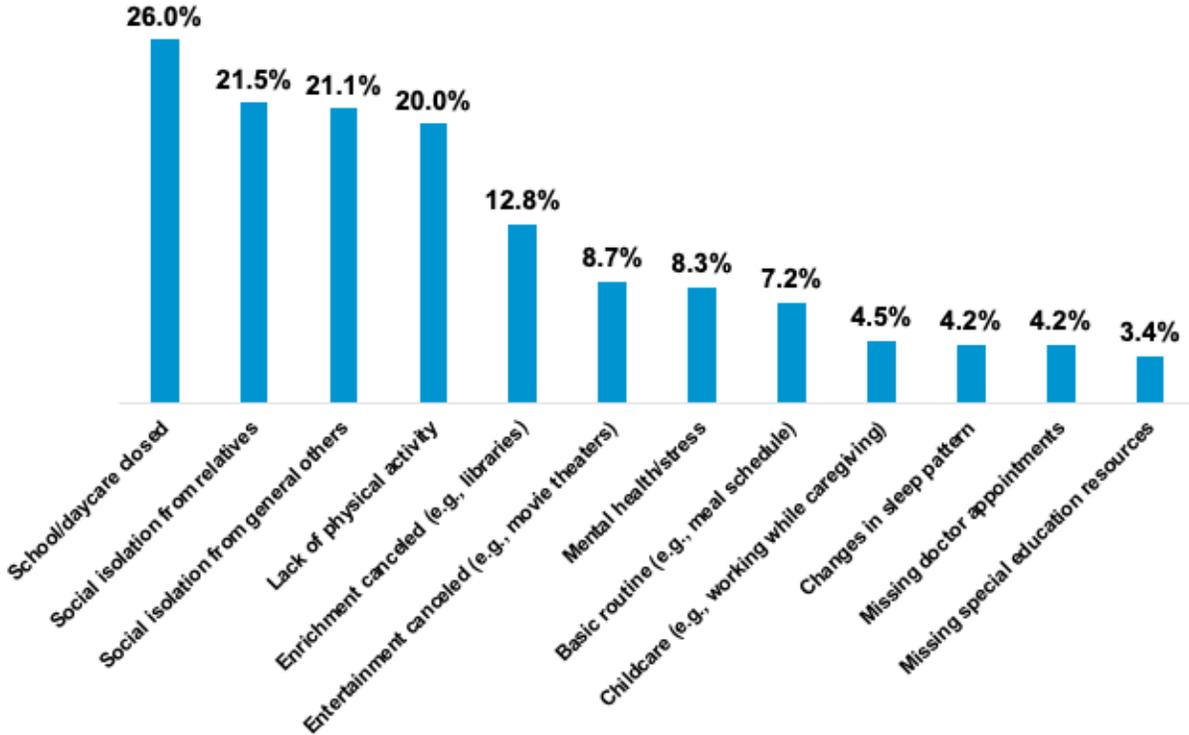
RESULTS: ECONOMIC HARDSHIP DURING THE PANDEMIC

Economic hardship was common among the parents in this survey. Nearly 1 in 4 parents (24%) reported an employment status change (e.g., laid off, furloughed) due to Covid-19. Of the parents who experienced an employment status change, 62% reported having applied for or planning to apply for unemployment insurance. Over half of parents (58%) who utilized free/reduced-cost breakfast or lunch for their child(ren) reported that since the Coronavirus pandemic, they were no longer able to receive free/reduced-cost breakfast or lunch.

RESULTS: CHILD ACTIVITIES AND SCHEDULE DISRUPTIONS

80% of parents said that their child’s schools had been closed, and most indicated that after-school lessons (96%) and playdates with other children (96%) had been canceled. Figure 1 shows the most common disruptions that parents mentioned when asked about factors that were impacting their life due to Covid-19. A small number of parents reported no change in their daily schedule because the child was too young (2%) or previously homeschooled (< 1%).

Figure 1. Parents are Experiencing Numerous Daily Schedule Disruptions Since Coronavirus



COMMENTS FROM PARENTS

Parents provided responses to an open-ended question about how their daily schedule has changed since the Coronavirus global health crisis. Responses illustrate the challenges families have faced since Coronavirus, and how they have responded to these changes.

- “Special education for my son with autism has been moved online”
- “Can’t visit grandparents”
- “She misses her playmates”
- “They are restless inside... more fights between them”
- “Disrupted meal schedules”
- “His sleep pattern”
- “Diapers, wipes and formula always sold out everywhere hard to find”
- “I am trying to work while taking care of them”
- “Unable to receive procedure... due to non-emergency procedures being canceled.”

RESULTS: PREPARATION TO EDUCATE CHILDREN AT HOME

Social distancing and stay-at-home orders disconnected millions of children from in-person education and left little time for parents to prepare to support their children’s education at home. As seen in Figure 2, only about half (55%) of parents felt prepared to educate their child(ren) at home. One in four parents felt they did not have the resources they needed and 50% of parents felt overwhelmed by responsibilities to educate their child(ren) at home.

Figure 2. Many Parents Feel Prepared to Educate Children at Home, but Also Overwhelmed

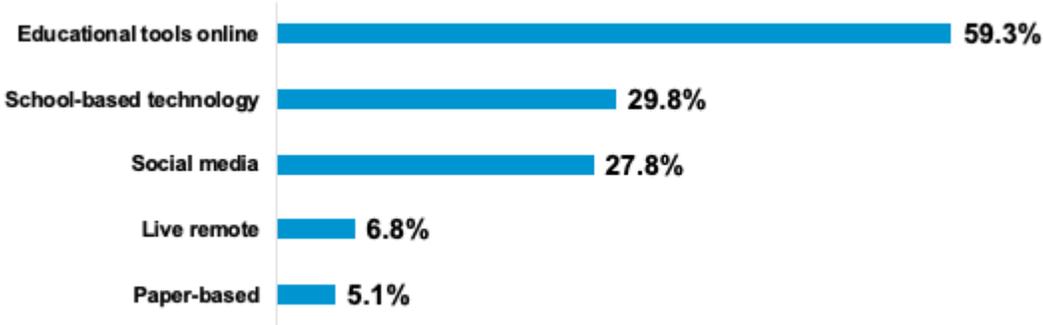


RESULTS: TRANSITION TO HOME-BASED EDUCATION

Parents were asked about the resources they were utilizing to educate their child(ren) at home. 77% of parents said that they used online or social media to educate children at home; 71% of parents indicated support from the child(ren)’s school as a resource to educate children at home; and 23% of parents indicated that they collaborated with other parents as a resource to educate children at home.

Parents were also asked about what specific tools they had used for at-home education. As seen in Figure 3, the use of online tools, such as ABC Mouse and Khan Academy, was common. School-provided technology (e.g., “teacher has mailed and emailed assignments,” “the schools [sic] app”) and social media (e.g., “YouTube,” “the mom groups on Facebook”) were also common. Few parents were using live-remote technology (e.g., “online meetings with teacher”) or paper-based resources (e.g., “printing out worksheets from K5 learning website”).

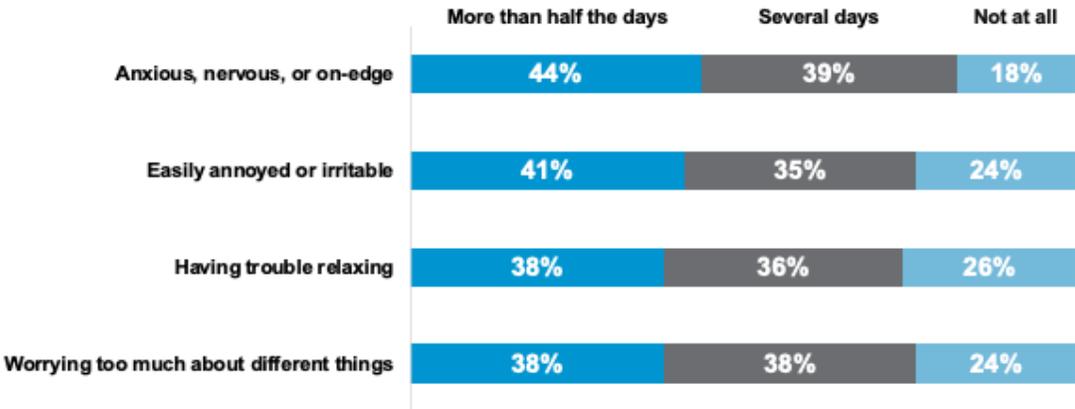
Figure 3. Most Parents are Using Online Educational Tools to Educate Children at Home



RESULTS: PARENT AND CHILD ANXIETY

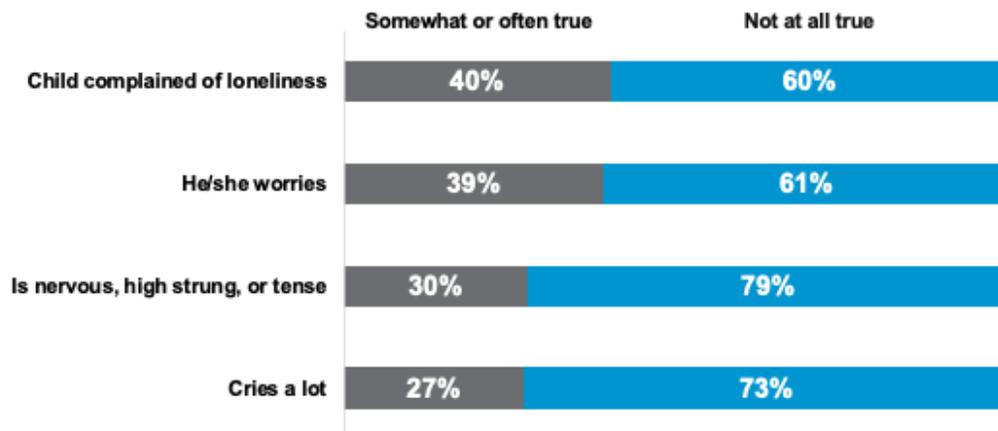
The survey indicated that the Coronavirus had contributed to a high level of anxiety among parents and children (Figure 4). 44% of parents reported feeling anxious, nervous, or on-edge “more than half the day” or “nearly every day”; becoming easily annoyed or irritable (41%); having trouble relaxing (38%); and worrying too much about different things (38%) “more than half the day” or “nearly every day.”

Figure 4. Parent Anxiety Since Coronavirus



As seen in Figure 5, parents also assessed that their child was experiencing high levels of anxiety: 40% of parents reported that it was “somewhat true” or “very often true” that their child complained of loneliness; worried (39%); was nervous, high strung, or tense (30%); and cried a lot (27%).

Figure 5. Child Anxiety Since Coronavirus



SUMMARY

This survey was launched on April 14, 2020, when about 8 of 10 (78%) parents reported that they were educating their child at home due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The results show high levels of hardship among parents. Over half of parents who utilized free or reduced-cost breakfast or lunch programs (58%) were no longer able to receive that resource. This is an enormous problem and suggests that many school-age children may face hunger as the pandemic persists. Other disruptions to daily life included social isolation, lack of physical activity, canceled activities and enrichment, stress, changes in basic routines, missing health appointments, and inaccessible special education resources.

Although parents were adapting to the demands of at-home education through a high use of online educational tools, most (50%) felt overwhelmed by responsibilities to educate their children at home. One in four parents felt that they did not have the resources they needed to educate their children at home.

Unfortunately, many parents reported very high levels of depression, anxiety, and stress during Coronavirus. Children also appeared to be experiencing greater mental health vulnerability, including anxiety.

Taken together, these data point to the many concerns and challenges faced by families with young children transitioning to home-based education during the Coronavirus pandemic. In consideration of in-person education closures, it is critical to develop solutions for families that rely on school-provided meals, special education resources, and mental health services.



For more information about the **Stress and Parenting During a Pandemic** study:

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Suggested Citation Format:

Lee, S.J., Ward, K.P., & Chang, O.D. (2020, September). *Research brief: Parents' perceptions of the shift to home-based education during the Covid-19 pandemic*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Parenting in Context Research Lab. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2Ra5Q2R>